

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0014

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

Z.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LA, US

SUBJECT: CALL ON LAO FOREIGN MINISTER, PHOUNE SIPRASEUTH

REF: VIENTIANE 0011

SUMMARY. PHOUNE SIPRASEUTH SAID LAOS WANTED GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES REPRESENTED HERE, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES, AND WITHOUT SPECIFICALLY ASKING FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE OR MAKING GOOD OR IMPROVED RELATIONS DEPENDENT ON IT, EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT LAOS WOULD OBTAIN ASSISTANCE FROM ALL FRIENDLY COUNTRIES. HE DESCRIBED LAOS' BUDGETARY "REEDUCATION" AND FOOD PROBLEMS IN GENERAL TERMS AND TOOK A SURPRISINGLY MILD LINE IN THE THAI-LAO BORDER PROBLEM. END SUMMARY.

1. JANUARY 3 I PAID COURTESY CALL ON DEPUTY PRIME

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MINISTER-FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUNE SIPRASEUTH, WHO IS ALSO

A MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO OF THE LAO PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY. ALTHOUGH I HAVE SEEN PHOUNE PRETTY OFTEN IN RECENT MONTHS AND WEEKS, CALL ON HIM WAS INCLUDED IN SERIES OF CALLS ON NEW GOVERNMENT MEMBERS ARRANGED FOR ME BY PROTOCOL. I RENEWED OUR DESIRE TO MAINTAIN NORMAL RELATIONS WITH LAOS ALONG LINES REFTEL. PHOUNE REPLIED THAT LAOS WANTED GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES REPRESENTED HERE INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES. WITHOUT SPECIFICALLY ASKING FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE OR MAKING GOOD OR IMPROVED RELATIONS IN ANY WAY DEPENDENT ON SUCH ASSISTANCE, HE EXPRESSED HOPE LAOS WOULD OBTAIN ASSISTANCE FROM ALL FRIENDLY COUNTRIES.

2. PHOUNE DESCRIBED LAOS' NEEDS IN GENERAL TERMS ALONG FOLLOWING LINES. NOT ONLY WAS THE COUNTRY UNDEVELOPED AND SUFFERING FROM A LONG WAR, BUT ITS BUDGET HAD BEEN DOUBLED BY THE RETENTION OF CIVIL SERVANTS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL OF BOTH SIDES ON THE PAYROLL UNTIL ARRANGEMENTS COULD BE MADE FOR THEM TO EARN THEIR OWN LIVING. THERE WERE STILL SOME 50,000 REFUGEES TO BE RETURNED TO THE RURAL AREAS FROM WHICH THEY HAD FLED. THAILAND HAD COMPLICATED MATTERS BY CLOSING THE LAND BORDER. ALTHOUGH IT HAD BEEN DECLARED OPEN AND PEOPLE WERE MOVING ACROSS IT, NO GOODS WERE TRANSITING AND HE DID NOT EXPECT THIS TRAFFIC WOULD START MOVING UNTIL JANUARY 5 OR 6.

3. ON THE OTHER HAND, PHOUNE SAID THE CROPS WERE GOOD AND EDUCATION OF PEOPLE ON HOW TO PROCEED IN THE NEW SYSTEM WAS MOVING AHEAD. GENERAL SEMINARS WERE NOW UNDERWAY AND WOULD BE SUCCEDED BY MORE SPECIFIC ONES. WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS THE CURRENT SEMINARS WERE AN ESSENTIAL PRELIMINARY TO THE PREPARATION OF THE 1976 BUDGET. MEASURES WERE ALSO BEING TAKEN TO MAKE FOOD SUPPLIES GENERALLY AVAILABLE ON AN EQUITABLE BASIS AND TO PREVENT PROFITEERING. A STORE WOULD EVENTUALLY BE ESTABLISHED TO MAKE ESSENTIAL ITEMS AVAILABLE TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS. THE TWO CURRENCIES CIRCULATING IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY WOULD HAVE TO BE REPLACED BY A SINGLE CURRENCY.

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4. AS FAR AS THAILAND WAS CONCERNED LAO BORDER PATROLS AND OFFICIALS HAD BEEN GIVEN ORDERS TO AVOID FALLING INTO THE TRAP OF PROVOCATION. THEY HAD BEEN TOLD IT WAS BETTER TO LOSE ONE OR TWO MEN THAN TO HAVE A BORDER INCIDENT. THE BORDER BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS WAS JUST TOO LONG TO BE HAVING INCIDENTS ALL THE TIME.

5. REVERTING TO THE GENERAL THEME OF UNITED STATES-LAO RELATIONS, PHOUNE SAID HE HOPED AMERICAN AUTHORITIES WOULD COME TO UNDERSTAND THE INTENTIONS OF THE NEW LAO GOVERNMENT. HE SUMMARIZED THESE AS MAKING LIFE MORE EQUITABLE FOR EVERYONE AND TEACHING EVERYONE "DUTY TO THE NATION." THE FIRST OF THESE AIMS WOULD BE REFLECTED IN NARROWING THE SPREAD IN WAGE LEVELS BETWEEN THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST GRADES IN THE GOVERNMENT SERVICE. SOME PROGRESS HAD ALREADY BEEN MADE IN INCREASING UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN TOP AND MIDDLE LEVEL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND BETWEEN MIDDLE AND LOWER LEVEL EMPLOYEES.

6. COMMENT: I THINK PHOUNE HANDLED THE QUESTION OF EVENTUAL U.S. ASSISTANCE IN A "ONCE OVER LIGHTLY" FASHION BECAUSE HE KNEW THAT NOUPHANH HAD COVERED IT PRETTY THOROUGHLY THE PREVIOUS DAY (REFTEL). HIS RATHER MILD APPROACH TO THE THAI BORDER PROBLEM WAS SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE, GIVEN THE CURRENT HARSH TONE OF LAO PROPAGANDA ON THE SUBJECT. HIS DESCRIPTION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO "EDUCATE" THE PEOPLE AND ORGANIZE FOOD DISTRIBUTION WAS PROBABLY A GOOD BROAD-BRUSH DESCRIPTION OF THESE ACTIVITIES FROM THE PDRL POINT OF VIEW.
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